

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FNN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5709
LARRY LESUEUR

APRIL 11, 1978

MASS RETIREMENT FROM CONGRESS

ANNCR:

IF THE CURRENT TREND CONTINUES, A RECORD-BREAKING NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE U.S. CONGRESS WILL VACATE THEIR SEATS NEXT JANUARY ... AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA'S LARRY LESUEUR.

VOICE:

THE TERMS OF ALL 435 MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND ONE-THIRD OF THE SENATE WILL EXPIRE ON JANUARY THIRD OF NEXT YEAR. THAT'S WHEN THE 95TH TWO-YEAR SESSION OF CONGRESS COMES TO AN END. SO FAR THIS YEAR, FORTY-EIGHT INCUMBENTS HAVE ANNOUNCED THEY WILL NOT SEEK RE-ELECTION IN NOVEMBER....A PACE RUNNING AHEAD OF THE RECORD ESTABLISHED IN THE LAST CONGRESSIONAL SESSION WHEN 58 MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS VOLUNTARILY GAVE UP THEIR SEATS.

DESPITE THE HEAVY TURNOVER THROUGH RESIGNATIONS, THERE IS STILL TALK OF LIMITING THE NUMBER OF TERMS A REPRESENTATIVES OR SENATOR MAY SERVE IN AN EFFORT TO REFORM THE U.S. CONGRESSIONAL SENIORITY SYSTEM. TWO NEW SENATORS, IN FACT, MADE CAMPAIGN PLEDGES TO RETIRE AFTER TWO SIX-YEAR TERMS. NONETHELESS, THE IDEA OF LIMITING CONGRESSIONAL TERMS IS LESS POPULAR AMONG ELECTED OFFICE-HOLDERS THAN IT IS WITH THE PUBLIC.

THE QUESTION OF WHY SO MANY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ARE RETIRING IS DIFFICULT TO ANSWER BECAUSE THE REASONS OFFERED BY THE RETIREES ARE SO HIGHLY DIVERSE. LIBERALIZED PENSIONS ARE CERTAINLY AN ATTRACTION, BUT SOME LAWMAKERS OBVIOUSLY RETIRE BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THEY WILL BE DEFEATED IN THE

NEXT ELECTION. OTHER MIGHT BE MORE THAN WILLING TO RUN BUT HAVE LOST THE SUPPORT OF THEIR LOCAL POLITICAL PARTY. SOME RESIGN FOR HEALTH REASONS, OF COURSE. THREE SENATORS DIED IN OFFICE THIS YEAR AND SOME OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OR SENATE HAVE BOWED OUT FOR REASONS OF ADVANCING AGE.

FULLY ONE-HALF OF THE HOUSE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY HAVE SERVED FEWER THAN THREE TERMS, MANY OF THEM ELECTED FOLLOWING THE 1974 WATERGATE SCANDAL. STILL, SENIORITY IS THE ROAD TO POWER IN CONGRESS, INASMUCH AS COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN ARE ALMOST ALWAYS THE RANKING SENIOR COMMITTEE MEMBER OF THE MAJORITY PARTY. (OPT) IN THE SENATE, 78-YEAR-OLD FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN SPARKMAN IS RETIRING, AS IS SENATOR EASTLAND, THE 73-YEAR-OLD CHAIRMAN OF THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE. IN THE HOUSE, REPRESENTATIVE MAHON, CHAIRMAN OF THE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE IS STEPPING DOWN AT 78 AFTER 43 YEARS OF SERVICE IN CONGRESS. (END OPT)

THE IMMINENT RETIREMENT OF SOME OF THE PROMINENT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS MAY HAVE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, YOUTHFUL SENATOR FRANK CHURCH, CONSIDERED A LIBERAL, WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY SUCCEED SENATOR SPARKMAN AS THE INFLUENTIAL SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN. AND ON THE POWERFUL SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE, CONSERVATIVE SENATOR EASTLAND, A SOUTHERN COTTON PLANTER, IS EXPECTED TO GIVE WAY TO SENATOR KENNEDY OF THE HIGHLY INDUSTRIALIZED NORTHEASTERN STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

JS/PY